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SUBJECT: FARC INTRANSIGENT, ELN IN POSSIBLE RESPONSE TO NEW
GOC PEACE OVERTURES

Summary

¶1. (U) On September 4, Episcopal Conference President Castro suggested that the FARC consider new peace options to restart negotiations with the GOC but noted that he disapproved of former President Turbay's notion of trading eleven FARC hostages for one imprisoned FARC guerrilla. FARC Spokesman Raul Reyes rehashed the group's demands and claimed only a concerted effort could overcome the negotiation impasse. The ELN cited five barriers to peace in an August 25 communique, indicating that both guerrilla groups remain focused on well-established barriers to negotiation. On September 7, the GOC announced it would permit ELN leader Francisco Galan to leave prison for three months to further possible ELN-GOC peace talks. End summary.

Church's Call for New Ideas

¶2. (U) Episcopal (Bishop's) Conference President Archbishop Luis Castro asked the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to consider a "change in course" to restart talks with the GOC during his September 4 mass. The remarks inaugurated the annual NGO and Catholic Church-sponsored "Week of Peace" to discuss new avenues towards a negotiated settlement between the GOC and insurgent groups. On September 5, Castro told leading daily "El Tiempo" that President Uribe had made repeated overtures, which the FARC ignored, thus blocking negotiation. Castro urged the guerrillas to approve a ceasefire and reopen negotiations with the GOC. Castro rejected Former President Julio Turbay's September 3 idea of a "pro-rated exchange" in which the FARC would release ten extortive kidnap victims and one political hostage in exchange for the release of one imprisoned FARC member, commenting it would prove too complicated to implement.

FARC Rehashes Demands

¶3. (U) FARC Spokesman Luis Edgar Devia AKA "Raul Reyes" also declined Turbay's suggestion in an interview posted on ANNCOL's website on September 4. He stressed that FARC hostages, whether held for political or economic reasons, could only be exchanged as a group. In a separate FARC Secretariat communique on September 5, they (1) refused the Catholic Church's August 23 "pre-dialogue" offer; (2) thanked the Church and other facilitators for their efforts; and (3) stated that only a concerted effort to unite Colombians could successfully establish a prisoner exchange and open a path to future negotiations. During the ANNCOL interview, Reyes added the recently arrested FARC "representative in Brazil"

Francisco Antonio Cadenas AKA "El Cura" to the list of FARC leaders required for an exchange. The FARC insisted that "Sonia," Simon Trinidad, extradited to the United States; Rodrigo Granda, currently in Colombia; and Francisco Cadenas in Brazil all be released.

ELN Names Five Barriers to Peace

¶4. (U) The National Liberation Army (ELN) replied to the Church's August 23 "pre-dialogue" proposal with an ambiguous communique; the message neither approved nor rejected Castro's proposal. However, the group's August 25 communique accused the GOC of creating five barriers to peace: (1) the GOC failure to recognize the social, economic and political causes of Colombia's conflict; (2) the GOC's notion that peace talks are strictly a government-insurgency dialogue; (3) its refusal to acknowledge the humanitarian crisis faced by poorer Colombians victimized by the conflict; (4) the government's denial that an internal conflict exists; and (5) its "peace process" with paramilitaries and the Law of Justice and Peace which benefited criminals. On September 7, President Uribe offered to recognize Colombia's violence as an internal conflict in exchange for the ELN agreeing to a ceasefire and peace talks.

¶5. (U) In a late development on September 7, the GOC announced its willingness to release imprisoned ELN leader Gerardo Antonio Bermudez Sanchez AKA "Francisco Galan" for three months to help establish peace talks. The GOC communique noted the ELN leadership's interest in beginning an exploratory dialogue with civil society and eventually with the GOC. The GOC based Galan's temporary release on Colombian Law 782, which allows a pardon for political crimes like sedition if the combatant demonstrates his willingness to advance a peace process. So far, Galan has served thirteen years of a 30 year sentence for terrorism, kidnapping, treason, and other miscellaneous crimes. Local press reports rightly indicate that Galan's release is still awaiting ELN agreement to allow him to serve as a bridge to peace talks.

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